

Scribbler

OCTOBER 2014

ISSUE 81

Editor's Note

This issue of *The Scribbler* sort of has a theme; i.e., "What are you thinking about the world you live in today?" "Sort of" because not all writers chose to engage with it. Six who address the query directly are Alice Molloy, Diane di Prima, May Garsson, Kirk Johnson, Bob Boler, and Ava Bird. Their responses provide nourishing food for further thought. The other writers chose to deal with poetry's traditional subjects; death, types of love & sex, kinds of transcendence, etc., all accomplished poems and good "reads."

The next issue of *The Scribbler* will also be "themed." Please submit poems, short stories or essays (500 words or fewer) on the Arts: e.g., music, literature, dance, the visual arts (including cartooning), etc., either from the point of view of a practitioner or a passionate appreciator. Submissions for the next issue should be sent to Karnit@LMI.net. or by snail mail to Kayla Sussell, 420-45th Street, Oakland, CA 94609

-Kayla Sussell

Life Today

I like my life right now, in full retirement after a lifetime of work and after some medical stuff (new hips, etc). Leisuredly reading papers in morning with coffee, then surfing the Net with breakfast and while taking in today's events reflecting on the changes of the past fifty years: Zen, the alternate door that opened to us; drugs, which expanded that opening; more freedom for women (although violence and the male gaze still predominate); more freedom for Black women and men (although prisons are the white Justice System's preferred gated community for them).

But I am in a state of savage anger at the destruction of our planet in the name of progress. Destruction of the habitats of the other persons on the planet who we call animals birds insects, turning the planet into raw materials. This is the work of the aliens among us, the corporations. We humans have a hierarchy in which human males are on top, and now the aliens are on top; to whom we are the chickens in the coop, whose culture doesn't count, whose personnel departments are now called Human

Resources departments, putting us right up there with mineral resources.

This planetary destruction has resulted in what we call climate change And we know about the horrifying things that will happen if it isn't stopped. Horrifying things have already started to happen. Manhattan almost destroyed, Sandy Hook, terrible droughts, aquifers being drained. Along with the endless-war refugees we'll have human habitat-destruction refugees. What will it take for the necessary day by day changes that might soon hold back, reverse the climate changes? Corporations, which now control most everything, have no interest in that, preferring to make things take as long as possible. And really, the science fiction writers are absolutely no help. They've given us fifty-ish years of destruction fiction (we get it, okay?). Despair fiction that demoralizes. I want to see science fiction that gives us a playbook we can all participate in. Because it will take all of us.

— Alice Molloy

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John Miatech Tama Zorn May Garsson

Adele Mendelson Sharon Coleman

Anna Mae Stanley Kirk Johnson Ava Bird

Bob Boler Miranda Coffee Terry Ehret

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Submissions and Editorial Policies:

Basic Acceptance Policy: If the current editor likes a piece, it gets published; if not, it is passed on to the next editor who will either use it, or return it to the author. All rights are reserved. Send submissions to: scribbler@matsonpoet.com

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SCHEDULE AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

POETRY SALOON (drunk on poetry!)

Meets at 472 44th Street, Oakland, the second Friday of the month. Potluck at 6pm, reading at 7:30pm.

Bring poems or prose by you and others to share, or come just to enjoy. Hosted by Kayla Sussell and Jayne McPherson.

October 10, November 14, December 12, January 9.

CRAZY CHILD WRITING WORKSHOPS (fee: \$80)

Saturdays, 10am - 5pm, once a month.

November 8 in Oakland

December 13 in Middletown

January 3, 2015 in San Anselmo

10-WEEK WORKSHOPS poetry, prose, plays, nonfiction (fee: \$400), Mondays and Wednesdays, 7pm - 10pm, Temescal District, Oakland.

Current series end December 1 and December 3.

Next series start December 8 and December 10.

NOVEL AND CREATIVE NONFICTION WORKSHOPS (fee: \$400 for ten sessions)

One ongoing, intensive workshop meets for three hours every other Monday in Marin. Writers bring ten pages to each session. Limited to five writers.

STRUCTURE OF LARGE WORK

(fee: \$400 for ten sessions)

For writers with a draft of a full-length play, a script, or a novel, or who want to start a large work. Our topics are from a standard repertory, starting with "Whose story is it?" First session Friday, November 14, next sessions to be scheduled.

THE NOVEL'S ARC (fee: \$500 for four sessions)

In this workshop four novelists commit to reading each other's novels and examining how the novel works as a whole. We'll devote a two-hour session to each novel. Next sessions start in December, dates to be arranged.

WRITING EXCURSIONS: SEE PAGE 8

For more information about any workshop, visit matsonpoet.com or phone 510-654-6495. To register, phone 510-654-6495 or email clive@matsonpoet.com (unless otherwise noted).

Experiment

Try this just once. Think of it as an experiment. Tip of the tip of the iceberg and we ain't even on the Titanic. Not that much "safety." But it's a start. Sit down on a curb with somebody. Break what you got to eat in two pieces. If they don't seem even, take the smaller piece. (It's an experiment, you're only doing it once.) Both of you eat what you got. Chewing slowly, noticing the taste. Sit five to 15 minutes together without saying anything, just notice how the world looks. Maybe you feel the same as ever. Maybe not.

Untitled

we predicated everything
on how it was
& now the way it *is*
just don't compute

— Two by Diane di Prima

At the Doorway

*Those to whom evil is done
do evil in return*
— W. H. Auden

You are pounding at the door
of Lori Wong's flat, bleeding
from the bullet in your back.
In a moment you kneel,
bend to the terrazzo step,
and have the last thought
of this life.

The ones who have killed you
go on, their lives closing
around a wound
that was never bound;
closing as if rage,
as if taking
could replace the blood
they lost.

— Matt McKay

Those who die too young

if only
before their leaving
we knew the fates of those who die
too young

if only
to utter more reassurances
to gently buoy their destiny
as a lily on water
a seed on air

but if not,
when they're gone
to be the medium of their message
our breath, their breath,
the zephyr of their flight;
our tears, the water
of their eternal Baptism;
our last embrace, the earth of their impression—
a silent blessing
a footfall on moon dust
where no breeze
no breath
obliterates.

— Roberta DeDoming



ATARAXIA

I think of the space beneath the dirt
in my houseplant, filled with pebbles for drainage.
There's air in there, and it's very dark:
the scientists would call it aphotic.
I like that, like the idea of a dark tiny space
where the air bounces slowly between pebbles,
sounds comforting to me, like the idea
of the Greeks still holding ground amidst our language,
and I like especially that dank soiled smell
of the lightless air underneath the Greek language
in the blue pot there by my window
from which a little bunch of lavender thrives.

— Richard Loranger

Highway 395

If you want to know
The soul of this place, this ancient place,
Then you are on the right road

Wandering along the lee of the Sierras,
One finds a quiet
That is not evident elsewhere

Here, the Paiute and Shoshone spirits
Will have a word with you, if you linger
Telling you of the time before...

When there was much water in the Owens
Valley,
When there were bighorn sheep...
There, on that rock, the pictures they made

Now the sheep are gone,
The water has been stolen,
And only raven and rabbit and snake remain
And old coyote

Under the cottonwoods on Baker Creek you
can hear this story
In the hills in back of Olancho, where the wind
cries all day
Is another part of this same tale...

And when you find a bright chip of obsidian,
From the time when hunting was good here,
And this place was really alive,
You might look up and almost see
The faces of those whose spirits are now
speaking to you

And all around,
Blue sky

— John Miatech



Probate Court

I want them to remember their mother's house
smelled like cinnamon and garlic, like bread rising,
filling the rooms with the scent of yeast in a kitchen
that hugged you: warm breath on the glass, yellow
walls and woodpeckers at the window.
I want them to remember good coffee in big mugs at
the round table and their tea kettle of a mother
dancing in the steam to Springsteen, something
always in the oven, on the stove, in her hand, a jack
in the box about to pop.

Perhaps then they will forget the times she
turned her back, longed for silence, thought she
should have been a mime or how she'd smile as if
she were listening, far away as a witch on a
broomstick, taking flight from them, the dog, the
connections that turned bracelets to handcuffs.

I want them to remember dogs greeting them,
tails up, tongues wagging, tapping their way across
wooden floors in a house that smelled like wet
wool, crowded with creatures and comforts, snacks
on the table, friends at the door.

Perhaps then they will forget the times the
house seethed beneath oak floors, pulsed with rage,
and, manic with malice she turned herself to stone
until the anger wafted out an open window and the
house could breathe again.

I want them to remember cool hands on
foreheads, warm eyes on their faces, sleeping bags
and camping stoves, ant farms, farm stands,
sleepovers and popcorn smacking the pot like
pebbles thrown at a windowpane, a house bursting
at the seams until bedtime, when a long breath
cleared chaos, stories were told, and sleep soothed
the house down to size.

Perhaps then they will forget she wondered
whether a pillow over his face would work, if when
you fled, anyone could find you, if she could enter
her book like smoke and escape through the
chimney before anyone noticed, or simply ride a bus
to somewhere else.

I want them to remember two truths exist: one
where she would die for them and one in which,
daily, they kill her.

— Tama Zorn

Chemical Warfare

Feels wobbly
ataxic gait
lurch on stairs
hand rail out of reach.

Comes out of air
at first tranquil
then a blast
of the nurses' perfume,
the doctors' hair gel,
hand sanitizers

suffocated
with surfactants

up my nose,
my brain, my body
repel me from the room,
propel me down
the stairs

wobbly
ready
to throw up
linalool, camphor,
benzyl acetate,
styrene,

I side step
wide step
unbalanced gait
of a drunk
on a neurotoxin
roller coaster

I white knuckle
the hand rail
sweat and fear
mingle with blame

you did this to me
you did this to me

the blame
its own toxicity.

— May Garsson

Sleeping It Off in the South of Spain

A cheap hotel in a poor man's town,
a cold, uneasy sky framed by a curtainless window.
In a bed too narrow, his back to me,
sleeps a man I do not know. My clothes
are a pile on the floor, as far away as Sweden.

Memory roams through the ache in my brain, and

*a bar emerges from a black rain, colored lights
strung above the door, a Coca Cola sign beating yellow
on the hoods of farm trucks in the yard.
I walk into dim light, the smells of damp wool and chorizo.
A juke box blares loud enough to hear in Santos Sangre.
Children climb on and off the laps of women drinking beer
at plastic tables. A beaten face, unsteady at the bar,
argues with a man who has a pistol in his belt,*

*I dance every dance, drink every beer
until I no longer feel the eyes of the men
or the women pretending I'm not there.*

A shift and a grunt beside me. I slide out
from under the blanket, holding my breath,
inch towards my clothes, my arms across my breasts.
He yawns, lifts up. I freeze, an animal about to bolt.
Then, soft, he asks me in my language if I slept well, if I'm hungry.
And he turns to let me dress.

— Adele Mendelson

Faultlines

On the fissures of a rock-bound earth
petrified words grind thirsty tongues,
lifelines crack in our cupped hands.

We sit and stare at falling shards
in the midst of violent jolts
and hollow out stillness.

Sometimes we finger the grooves and scratches
of re-channeled terrain.

Sometimes we reach into the shattered stuff,
both guards and looters of the aftermath.

— Sharon Coleman

Reality

A large straw hat balances upon the ocean.
A yew tree hovers midair.
Thus reality begins to unravel.

Anything can happen on paper.
A pair of koi can swim within a cloud.
A candle can burn but not decrease.

This is the place where everything
falls out of order.
A bicyclist pedals backward up a hill.
A bird with a broken wing flies.

Nothing on the page is ordinary.
A tree grows without leaves.
A rabbit hops using its front paws.

Sometimes what happens on the page is
conceivable,
such as a zebra born with no stripes
or a Persian rug that floats on water.

On the page what happens is as ordinary
as a flower that blooms only at night
or a clown who cries in a corner.

— Anna Mae Stanley

Old Soldier

escaped from old
soldier's home. Last seen

reconnoitering

*

Even blind

wet grass
far & cut

& any night's
sleep at all

too close
to the ground

— Kirk Johnson

the pledge

i pledge allegiance
to the lotus flower
from mother earth i stand
with good intention
for peace and justice for all,
ahimsa
but please
just stay the fuck off my land sir,
out of my ovaries and sacred underwear,
time to wash thy temple,
sage the fuck out of here,
clearing the chakras like crazy
chemtrails and pricks sticking poisons
time to fly bitch
time to die into a new beginning,
beginner's mind again
now again
leafy greens
with liberty and justice for all
and please
leave
no
trace.

— ava bird

Recipe for Misery (and an Eventual Unremarked End)

Believe: Morality and Preferences are One.
Make needs of your Wants.
Hang Onto Things.
Use as your reason for not giving – “They will know I have.”
Be catholic and unspecific in your suspicion of others.
Manufacture danger.
Keep an eye out for new ways of dying.
Memorize reasons on the impracticality of love.
Recite them – silently – in the presence of whoever needs,
or needs to give, love.
Be wary of the absurd and the spontaneous.
Try to understand laughter.
Despise the fallible.
Deny that we are unique.
If you know; forget who you are,
If not – cultivate indifference.

— Bob Boler

Countdown

My mother was only thirty-one
when the Roaring Twenties
hit an iceberg and sank.
She had no more babies.
All over Catholic Boston
the birth rate fell
and they weren't using condoms.

A riddle for sixty years
until I heard the scientist
on my kitchen radio fretting
about lower sperm counts
due to stress.

He cited U.S. birth rates falling
from 2711/thousand in the twenties
to 17.2 in the Depression.
He'd done the research:
*The more stress a man feels,
the lower his sperm count.
On death row – zero.*

— Miranda Coffee

How Fascism Will Come*

"When fascism comes to America it will be wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross."
— attributed to Sinclair Lewis

When fascism comes, it will greet us with a smile. It will get down on its knees to pray. It will praise Main Street and Wall Street. It will cheer for the home team. It will clap from the bleachers when the uninsured are left to die on the street. It will rally on the Washington Mall. It will raise monuments to its heroes and weep for them and place bouquets at their stone feet and trace with their fingers the names engraved on the granite wall and go on sending soldiers to die in the mountains of Afghanistan, in the deserts of Iraq. It will send doves to pluck out the eyes of its enemies, having no hawks to spare.

When fascism comes, it will sit down for tea with the governor of Texas. It will pee in the mosques from California to Tennessee, chanting, *"Wake up America, the enemy is here."* It will sing the anthems of corporatization, privatization, demonization, monopolization. *It will be interviewed, lovingly, on talk radio.* It'll have talking points and a Facebook page and a *disdain for big words or hard consonants*. It won't bother to read. It will shred all its books. It will lambast the teachers and outlaw the unions.

When fascism comes, it will look good. It will have big hair, pressed suits, lapel pins. It will control all the channels. It will ride in on Swift Boats. It will sit on the Supreme Court. It will court us with fear. It will woo us with hope. When fascism comes, it will sell shares of itself on the stock market. It will get rich, then it will get obscenely rich, then it will stop paying taxes. It will leave us in the dust. It will kick our ass. *It won't have to break a sweat to fool us twice.* It will be too big to fail.

When fascism comes to America, *it will enter on the winds of our silence and indifference and complacency.* And on that day, one hundred thousand poets will gather. In book stores and libraries, bars and cafes, in their houses and apartments, in schools and on street corners, they will gather. In Albania, Bangladesh, Botswana, Bulgaria, Chile, China, Czech Republic, Finland, Guatemala, Hungary, Macedonia, Malawi, Qatar, *crying, laughing, screaming.* They will wrap the *sad music of humanity* in bits of word cloth and hang them, like prayers, on the tree of life.

**Author's note: This was written for the 100 Thousand Poets for Change reading, September 23, 2011, Santa Rosa, California. The poem is woven with images and fragments of rants and blogs and online articles I found when I googled the Sinclair Lewis quote. These appear in Italics.*

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— Terry Ehret**



WRITING EXCURSION 2015

January 31 - February 7, 2015

"Writing Costa Rica"

Nosara, Costa Rica, fee \$1400

Host: Deborah Tommassini

debratom@aol.com, 212-381-1823

www.NosaraRetreat.com

For information on the workshop,

contact Clive, [510-654-6495](tel:510-654-6495) or

clive@matsonpoet.com

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